

What is claimed is:

- 1( A method, comprising:
- operating a knowledge-base system configured to store a database containing  
answers to questions, the knowledge-base system being operatively coupled to a client  
5 computer;
- receiving a message from the client computer;
- determining the message from the client computer was a reply to a previously  
generated message from the knowledge-base system; and
- 10 forwarding the message from the client computer to a representative in  
response to said determining.
- ✓ 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the message from the client computer  
is an email.
- 15 3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
- enclosing a message identification number on all communications sent by the  
knowledge-base system; and
- wherein said determining includes searching the message from the client  
computer for the message identification number.
- 20 4. The method of claim 3, wherein said forwarding includes attaching  
message history information.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
maintaining a communication log of communications sent and received with  
the knowledge-base system; and

wherein said determining includes ascertaining with the communication log  
5 whether a reply detection limit has been exceeded for the client computer.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the reply detection limit includes a  
communication interval limit of time intervals between successive communications  
with the client computer and a number of communications limits based on a number of  
10 communications with the client computer.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein the communications maintained in the  
communication log include email communications, web chatting communications,  
telephone conversations, and personal conversations.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the knowledge-base system and the  
client computer are operatively coupled over a network.

9. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
20 enclosing a message identification number on all communications sent by the  
knowledge-base system;  
maintaining a communication log of communications sent and received with  
the knowledge-base system; and

wherein said determining includes searching the message from the client computer for the message identification number and ascertaining with the communication log whether a reply detection limit has been exceeded for the client computer.

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10. The method of claim 1, wherein the representative is a human being.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the representative is an automated system.

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12. A method, comprising:

operating a knowledge-base system configured to store a database containing answers to questions and a number of response templates each providing a different response format, the system being operatively coupled to a client computer;

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receiving from the client computer an input corresponding to a question;

generating a query result from the database in response to the question from the client computer;

creating a response message based on the question from the client computer, at least one of the response templates, and the query result; and

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sending the response message to the client computer.

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13. The method of claim 12, wherein said creating includes modifying the response message to indicate that no answers were found when the query result does not contain any answers.

5 14. The method of claim 12, wherein said creating includes modifying the at least one of the response templates based on the question from the client computer.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein said creating includes selecting the at least one of the templates based upon the query result.

10 16. The method of claim 12, wherein said generating includes:  
calculating a score for each question and answer in the database; and  
selecting at least one answer based upon a dynamic threshold resulting from a statistical distribution of all scores.

15 17. A method, comprising:  
operating a system configured with a database including a plurality of question-answer sets;  
receiving a query input to the system, the query input including a word;  
20 selecting one or more of the question-answer sets with the system in response to the query input by evaluating presence of the word in one or more answers of the question-answer sets differently than presence of the word in one or more questions of the question-answer sets; and

providing an output from the system based on said selecting.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said evaluating includes weighting the answers more than the questions.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein said evaluating includes weighting the answers less than the questions.

20. The method of claim 17, further comprising generating one or more word indices, said selecting including referencing the word indices.

21. The method of claim 17, wherein said selecting includes scoring a length of one of the questions in proportion to a length of the query input.

22. The method of claim 17, wherein said selecting includes scoring the question-answer sets to create a distribution of scores and determining the query result based upon variability of the scores.

23. The method of claim 17, further comprising designating one or more words to ignore.

24. The method of claim 17, further comprising alerting a representative when a particular one of the question-answer sets is included in the output.

25. The method of claim 17, further comprising:  
designating corresponding weights for the word in the questions and the  
answers; and

5 wherein said selecting includes scoring each of the questions and the answers  
using the corresponding weights.

26. The method of claim 17, further comprising defining aliases for at least  
one word.

27. The method of claim 17, further comprising designating one of the  
question-answer sets to always appear in the output for the query input.

28. The method of claim 17, further comprising designating one of the  
15 question-answer sets to never appear in the output for the query input.

29. The method of claim 17, further comprising proportionally weighting  
one of the question-answer sets to reduce likelihood of appearing in the output for the  
query input.

20 30. The method of claim 17, further comprising proportionally weighting  
one of the question-answer sets to increase likelihood of appearing in the output for  
the query input.

31. The method of claim 17, further adding a question-answer set to the database by email.

5 32. The method of claim 17, further comprising:  
receiving a message from a client computer coupled to the system;  
determining the message from the client computer was a reply to a previously  
generated message from the system; and  
forwarding the message from the client computer to a representative in  
10 response to said determining.

33. The method of claim 32, further comprising:  
creating a response message based on the message from the client computer, at  
least one of a number of response templates and the selected one or more sets, the  
15 system being configured to store the response templates each providing a different  
response format; and  
wherein said providing the output includes sending the response message to the  
client computer.

20 34. A method, comprising:  
operating a knowledge-base system configured to store a database formatted  
with a number of question-answer sets, the knowledge-base system being operatively  
coupled to a client computer;

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receiving an input corresponding to a question from the client computer;  
scoring the question-answer sets with respect to the question;  
determining a threshold limit based upon said scoring; and  
selecting the question-answer sets with scores above the threshold limit.

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35. The method of claim 34, wherein said determining includes:  
calculating variability of scores from said scoring; and  
basing the threshold limit on the variability of the scores.

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36. The method of claim 34, further comprising:  
defining an absolute threshold limit that is universally applicable to all  
received questions; and  
selecting the question-answer sets with scores above the absolute threshold  
limit.

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37. The method of claim 34, further comprising:  
creating a reflexive index that includes the question from the client computer  
and at least the selected question-answer sets from said selecting;  
scoring each question from the selected question-answer sets against the  
reflexive index;  
scoring the question from the client against the reflexive index to generate a  
question score; and

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choosing the selected question-answer sets with scores that favorably correlate with the question score.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein the reflexive index further includes  
5 all of the question-answer sets.

39. A method, comprising:  
operating a knowledge-base system configured to store a database formatted  
with a number of question-answer sets, the knowledge-base system being operatively  
10 coupled to a client computer;  
receiving an input corresponding to a question from the client computer;  
selecting one or more candidate sets from the question-answer sets based on  
the question from the client computer;  
creating a reflexive index that includes the question from the client computer  
15 and at least the candidate sets;  
scoring each question from the candidate sets against the reflexive index;  
scoring the question from the client against the reflexive index to generate a  
question score; and  
choosing the candidate sets with scores that correlate with the question score.

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40. The method of claim 39, wherein the reflexive index further includes  
all of the question-answer sets.

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41. A system comprising:

means for determining a message from a client computer was a reply to a previously generated message from a FAQ database and forwarding the message to a representative in response;

5 means for evaluating question components and answer components of the FAQ database independently relative to an input query; and

means for providing a response to the FAQ database query in accordance with one or more response templates, the response templates each relating to a different response format.

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42. The system of claim 41, further comprising means for selectively hiding or ignoring words included in one or more question-answer entries of the FAQ database.

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43. The system of claim 41, further comprising means for providing an alias designation.

44. A system for processing a question from a client computer, comprising:  
a database formatted with a number of question-answer sets, said sets each  
20 including a question field and a corresponding answer field, each of said question and answer fields being configured to contain one or more words, said database further including a question index that associates each of said words in said question fields

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with each of said question-answer sets and an answer index that associates said words in said answer fields with each of said question-answer sets;

a matcher operatively coupled to said database to produce a query result using both said question index and said answer index in response to the question from the

5 client computer; and

a processor operatively coupled to said matcher to send said query result to the client computer.

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